**Get Yourself Tested: A Community HIV Testing Intervention**

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Submitted to: NCTracs Pilot Program Grant

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
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Funds Requested: $2000

Duration of the Project: January 2014- April 10th, 2014

**Abstract:**

The objective of this project is to increase the number of students who have been tested for HIV on the UNC Chapel Hill campus. This community intervention will also serve to destigmatize HIV testing and revitalize the discourse about HIV on campus. From April 3rd to April 9th flyers and brochures regarding HIV testing would be distributed in highly trafficked areas and buildings around campus. These flyers would also advertise the Get Yourself Tested (GYT) event, which would be held in the Student Union on April 10th, 2014 to provide free HIV testing to all Carolina students in honor of National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day. This public testing event will help combat stigmatization of the HIV testing process by providing a nonjudgmental environment and lessening the embarrassment felt by individuals going to a testing clinic.

**Introduction:**

 Although medical advances have extended the lives of HIV patients and improved their qualities of life, there is still no lasting cure for HIV/AIDS infection. Hundreds of people are infected with HIV every year, an alarming number of whom are college-aged students and younger. Around 1 in 330 college students have been diagnosed with HIV, but only 29.2% of college students report having ever been tested for HIV (American College Health Association, 2013). College students have higher risks of HIV infections due to a variety of factors including risky sexual behaviors, stigmatization of HIV testing and HIV in general, and unwillingness to discuss sexual health with both professionals and sexual partners. College students do not always utilize safe sex resources such as condoms in order to help prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. In addition, HIV testing is regarded as a source of embarrassment rather than a healthy, responsible behavior that helps protect others from infection. This shame around sexual health and HIV testing in particular affects communication between sexual partners, furthering the spread of infections. Therefore, I propose a campus-wide Get Yourself Tested (GYT) event promoted by a short-term advertising campaign in order to help destigmatize the conversation around HIV testing on campus as well as publicize the HIV resources already available on campus. The purpose of this proposal is to jumpstart the conversation around HIV and testing on campus while providing test results free of charge to UNC students. Providing a shame-free environment in which students can be tested for HIV free of charge will help make students more comfortable with routine testing behaviors that could help reduce the number of young adults newly infected with HIV.

**Literature Review:**

Although the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) leads to the currently incurable acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), many individuals can go for extended periods of time without knowing they are infected. However, early identification of HIV carriers can prevent new infections, reduce healthcare expenditures, and reduce mortality rates - people unaware of their HIV infection are 3.5 times more likely to transmit HIV than those aware of their condition (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Despite these benefits, a report from the American College Health Association’s (2013) National College Health Assessment found that only 29.2% of college students reported having ever been tested for HIV. Alarmingly, the highest percentage of undiagnosed infections were among people aged 13-24 years, 59.5% of whom were unaware of their HIV infection (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Around 1 in every 330 college students has been diagnosed with HIV, but the CDC report suggests this figure could be doubled in reality (American College Health Association, 2013). This high number of undiagnosed, college-aged individuals necessitates wider action in order increase student participation in HIV testing. A campaign marketing the prevalence of HIV among college-aged students, culminating in a HIV testing event for the student body, could improve the number of students who are aware of their HIV status.

In their study of college students’ perceptions of HIV/AIDS, Opt and Loffredo (2004) found that although students were aware of the risks and transmission of HIV, they were not particularly concerned with personal risk of infection. In particular, they found that students were least knowledgeable of the effects of HIV on their own age group. Zak-Place and Stern (2004) confirmed this finding, citing an “unrealistically low perception of vulnerability” among the college students surveyed. These feelings of invulnerability among students discourage concern over personal infection. Authors of both studies suggest increasing general knowledge of the specific effect of HIV on young adults as a method of HIV prevention. Furthermore, Zak-Place and Stern (2004) identified a positive correlation between higher perceived benefits of HIV testing and the likelihood of students intending to be tested. Education on the importance of early detection for HIV, particularly with regards to young adults, could improve HIV testing rates for college-aged individuals.

However, personal benefits are not necessarily the primary motivation for the testing of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) such as HIV. Boudewyns and Paquin (2011) investigated the primary factors influencing the STI-testing intentions of undergraduate students. The strongest difference between those who intended to get tested and those who did not was their belief in the likelihood of the following two outcomes from testing: “It will show that I respect my sexual partner” and “It will prevent me from spreading an STI to someone else.” The prospect of knowing one’s own STI status was significantly less influential on the students’ intentions than these two ideas (Boudewyns & Paquin, 2011). In fact, the next most influential beliefs on STI testing were the disadvantageous outcomes of “Others will draw conclusions about my sex life” and “ I will be embarrassed.” Focusing on the top four most influential factors in students’ decisions about STI testing can help improve the efficacy of health promotion efforts regarding rates of HIV diagnoses.

The alarming number of young adults who have not been tested for HIV and may be unaware of an infection calls for the promotion of HIV testing on college campuses. Opt and Loffredo, as well as Stern and Zak-Place, identified the general sense of invulnerability among college students with regards to HIV as a major obstacle in increasing the number of students who have been tested. Additionally, Boudewyns and Paquin found that focusing on the effects of testing on the sexual partners of the students, as well as minimizing the embarrassment and shame associated with STI testing, can improve student participation in HIV testing. Most colleges, including the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, offer some form of free HIV testing through the student health centers on campus. Therefore, a campus-wide testing event would help advertise these resources while destigmatizing the conversation around HIV testing in general. Additionally, a campus-wide marketing campaign of this event focusing on the prevalence of HIV among college-aged students and the subsequent risks towards their sexual partners could increase the number of college students actively being tested for HIV.

**Project Narrative:**

The large number of college students who are unaware of their HIV status creates a high-risk environment for new HIV infections. Any community intervention aimed at increasing the number of college students who have been tested for HIV must also act to make getting tested a normal, positive act of responsibility in the minds of the students. The main aim of this proposal is to provide free HIV testing for as many UNC students as possible. Providing a friendly testing environment in which other students are also being tested for HIV helps normalize the behavior, combating stigmatization of getting tested among Carolina students. However, hosting the Get Yourself Tested (GYT) event could have broader impacts on perceptions of HIV on campus. Advertising of the event will promote conversations of HIV testing on campus, even among students who choose not to participate. Additionally, after students have been tested for HIV once, they would be more likely to feel comfortable getting tested for sexually transmitted infections in the future.

Another objective of this proposal is to promote the numerous HIV resources available on UNC Chapel Hill’s campus. Student Wellness provides the free state blood tests that will be given at the event free of charge by appointment throughout the year, as well as faster, inexpensive alternatives such as the rapid oral test. The Student Health Action Coalition also offers free OraQuick tests every Wednesday in Carrboro that can provide students’ results in around 30 minutes. However, these resources are not made widely known to UNC’s student body due to lack of communication between these organizations and Carolina students. Therefore, partnering with these organization to run the GYT event, as well as distributing their resources while advertising the testing could help enlighten students of these resources’ availability on campus.

This project would be split into two main parts: the advertising campaign and the GYT event.

**1. Advertising Campaign**

 From April 3rd-April 9th, I would pass out flyers promoting the event in The Pit (one of the most constantly busy areas on campus) using attention-grabbing statistics such as “people unaware of their HIV infection are 3.5 times more likely to transmit HIV than those aware of their condition” (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010) and “only 29.2% of college students report having ever been tested for HIV” (American College Health Association, 2013), as well as information about other regular opportunities for HIV testing from Student Wellness and SHAC. I would pass them out in the pit between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. each day, with help from other student volunteers. Some of these flyers would also be posted around campus in high-traffic areas, such as bathroom door stalls and bulletin boards in residence halls.

The main goal of this stage of the project is to advertise the Get Yourself Tested event in the Great Hall. However, the flyers will also help educate college students about the risks they face with regards to HIV and the importance of testing. This increased awareness could lead to a larger, more positive conversation around HIV testing on campus which can help fight some of the main obstacles of student participation in this testing like embarrassment and stigmatization. This stage should increase the number of students being tested even independently from the second stage of the project.

**2. Get Yourself Tested Event**

The Get Yourself Tested event would be held on April 10, 2014 in honor of National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day. On April 10th, the Student Wellness Sexual Health specialists and trained students from the Student Health Action Coalition would provide free HIV tests in the Great Hall of the Student Union from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Volunteers from other partnering organizations such as the Center for AIDS research and the student-led Sexuality and Gender Alliance would help direct incoming student participants to free testing stations, as well as running both a refreshments table and a table of information from Student Wellness for anyone who receives a positive test result. The first 50 students would be tested using the OraQuick rapid testing system, paid for by this grant, receiving their HIV status results within the hour. Any other students would be tested using the state blood test, leaving their contact information in order to receive their test results two weeks after the event. Secondary goals of this event include providing a nonjudgmental environment, encouraging communication about sexual health, and familiarizing students with available resources on campus.

**Personnel:**

Although I will be doing a majority of the preparation and distribution of the flyers personally, trained professionals themselves from both the Sexual Wellness Specialists of Student Wellness and medical students from the Student Health Action Coalition must give the HIV tests. However, other volunteers from student groups such as the Sexuality and Gender Alliance on campus will be recruited to help welcome students into the GYT event and give out information in the Pit. All volunteers must be able to providing a welcoming, judgment-free environment for the students in order for the project to accomplish its goals of destigmitization and normalization of HIV testing.

**Budget:**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item** | **Quantity** | **Cost** | **Subtotal** |
| Flyers | 500 | $0.12 | $60.00 |
| Brochures | 500 | $0.06 | $30.00 |
| OraQuick HIV Tests | 50 | $33.05 | $1652.50 |
| Pizza | 15 | $8.00 | $120.00 |
| Sodas | - | $137.50 | $137.50 |
|  |  | **Total** | **$2000.0** |

Flyers: This estimate is based on the cost for printing on a 8.5” x 11”piece of pastel cardstock from the UNC Student Stores Print Stop.  These will be both distributed in the Pit and pinned up in residence halls and public buildings around campus.

Brochures: This estimate is based on the cost for printing on a 8.5” x 11” piece of pastel paper also from the UNC Student Stores Print Stop.  Information from both Student Wellness and SHAC regarding HIV and HIV testing will be printed on these brochures to be distributed to students in the Pit.

OraQuick HIV Tests: This estimate comes from the costs of each test as posted by UNC Campus Health Services. These tests will provide results for the first 50 students within half an hour of their arrival.

Pizza and Sodas: The price estimate for the pizza comes from the cost of a large pizza from Domino’s Pizza. Any remaining money from this grant will serve to purchase sodas and other drinks for the event. These refreshments will serve to attract participating students as well as to provide a welcoming atmosphere in order to normalize the testing process.

**Project Timeline:**

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| --- | --- |
| Background Research | Completed |
| Proposal Development | Completed |
| Forging Organization Partnerships (Student Wellness and SHAC) | Completed |
| Recruitment of Student Volunteers | February 2014 |
| Designing and Printing of Flyers/Brochures | March 2014 |
| Organizing GYT event/ Purchasing tests and supplies | March 2014 |
| Advertising Campaign | April 3rd – April 9th, 2014 |
| GYT event | April 10th, 2014 |

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